

**ADVANCE Leadership Workshop**  
**"Building Consensus Among your Faculty"**

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## Building Consensus Among your Faculty

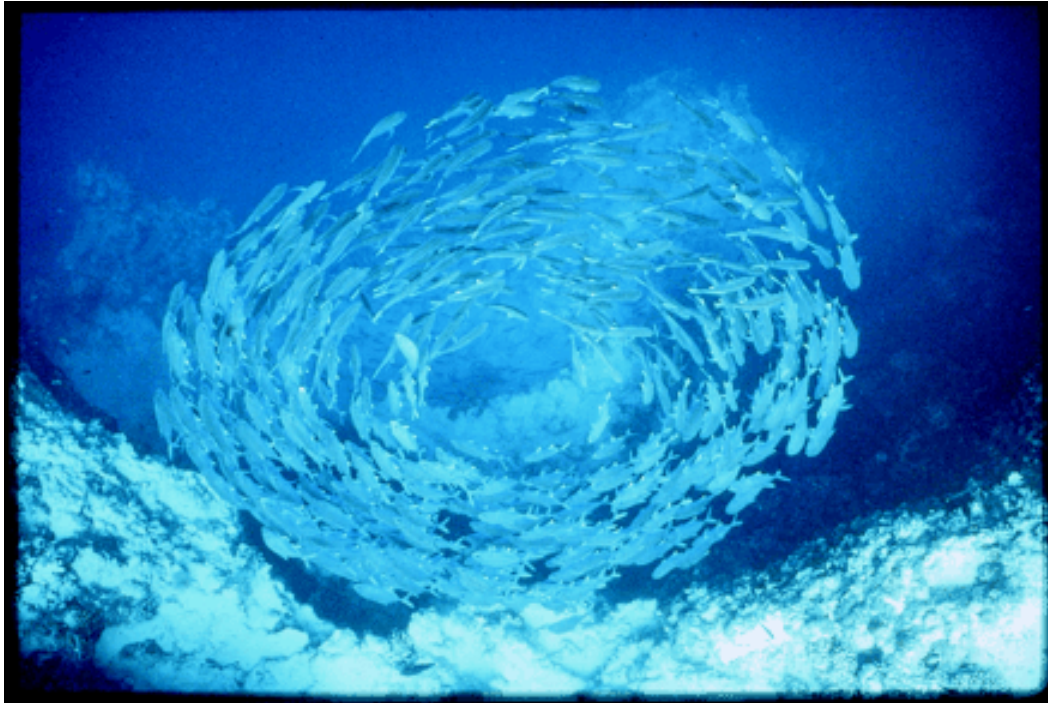
### WHAT ARE COMMON GOALS OF CHAIRS / DIRECTORS?

#### When consensus is needed:

- faculty searches  
(which area to hire in? which candidate to select?)
- decisions about resources  
(financial, space allocations)
- programmatic changes  
(revising graduate program, undergrad curriculum)
- other issues  
(any that require significant CHANGE in departmental policy or practice)

## Reaching a Consensus

A biological example of collective decision making and emergent properties



From "Complexity, pattern and evolutionary trade-offs in animal aggregation"

-- by J. Parrish and L. Edelstein-Keshet *Science* 284:99

## Reaching a Consensus

An example from the newly formed Department of Biology

Transforming the Biology Undergraduate Curriculum  
A project that extended from Fall 1999 -> Spring 2003

### Our Major Challenges

- SIZE (*>900 Biology majors + other bioscience majors affected*)
- INTEGRATION (*3 units, 3 cultures, ~ 40 faculty*)
- DEFINING AN IDEAL TEACHABLE CURRICULUM
- IMPLEMENTING THE CHANGES

Before: 4 degree programs administered by 3 units  
The end result: 1 degree program administered by 1 new  
department, many new courses

## Building Consensus Among your Faculty

Lessons we learned as we worked toward a consensus:

- 1) AN ESSENTIAL EARLY STEP is to present a framework for dealing with the issue at hand and a desired timeline for your faculty

Address:

Why is a decision or change important NOW?

What data do you have to support the need?

**If the issue is important, keep its visibility high!**

*(remind faculty of the importance in faculty meetings and in conversations with individuals; establish a high profile, effective committee to deal with the first steps)*

# Building Consensus Among your Faculty

Working toward consensus:

## 2) The Investment Stage

How do you convince your faculty to invest in the process?

Recognize different types of faculty and how they may each view the issue:

“Too busy” ... but potentially interested

“Disinterested”

“Too interested”

Different strategies are required to convince these different types of faculty of the benefits of investing in the decision making process and in making it equitable.

**Open communication and flexibility of the leader is key.**

## Building Consensus Among your Faculty

Working toward consensus:

### 3) Allow time for processing

Remind yourself that **CHANGE** can be (surprisingly) hard!

**LISTEN** to your faculty.

Seek the opinions of all involved, not just the “inner circle”

Emphasis the importance of respecting all opinions

The Chair sets an example and a tone in group meetings; use your influence to make certain that individuals are not marginalized in the process.

## Building Consensus Among your Faculty

Working toward consensus:

4) Keep discussions and meetings focused and efficient

Provide an agenda prior to meetings

Start and end on time

Multiple meetings are often more effective than the solo, very long meeting

Attention spans are short

*Make meetings one hour duration*

*Schedule meetings for a regular time*

"Between-meeting processing time" helps build consensus

**ONCE AGAIN:** If the issue is important, keep its visibility high and keep the discussion active throughout the process.



## Building Consensus Among your Faculty

Working toward consensus:

### 5) Making the decision and resolving differences

Given

a strong framework (Step 1)  
investment of the faculty (Step 2)  
adequate time for processing (Step 3)  
open communication (Step 4)  
flexibility and a reasonable time line...

Faculty should be ready for the VOTE.

As long as colleagues feel they have had ample opportunities for input, they should feel comfortable that the final decision made was indeed a consensus

... and (hopefully) they should be ready to move on.

## Building Consensus Among your Faculty

For longer term considerations, and as motivation to continually work toward consensus, leaders should remember:

Each difficult transition, no matter how “small”, can cause faculty to lose interest in contributing to the department.

Each successful transition, no matter how “small”, can contribute constructively to a more collegial and rewarding environment.